

# W. H. Davies

**William Henry Davies** or **W. H. Davies** (3 July 1871<sup>[2]</sup> – 26 September 1940) was a Welsh poet and writer. Davies spent a significant part of his life as a tramp or hobo, in the United Kingdom and United States, but became one of the most popular poets of his time. The principal themes in his work are observations about life's hardships, the ways in which the human condition is reflected in nature, his own tramping adventures and the various characters he met. Davies is usually classed as one of the Georgian Poets, although much of his work is not typical of the group, in either style or theme.<sup>[3]</sup>

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## Life and career

### W. H. Davies



Davies in 1913  
(by Alvin Langdon Coburn)

<b>Born</b>	3 July 1871 <div>Newport, Monmouthshire, UK</div>
<b>Died</b>	26 September 1940 (aged 69) <div>Nailsworth, Gloucestershire, England</div>
<b>Occupation</b>	Poet, writer, tramp
<b>Nationality</b>	British (Welsh)
<b>Period</b>	1905–1940
<b>Genre</b>	Lyrical poetry, autobiography
<b>Subjects</b>	Nature, begging, the life of a tramp
<b>Literary movement</b>	Georgian poetry
<b>Notable works</b>	<i>The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp</i> , "Leisure"

## Early life

<b>Spouse</b>	Helen Matilda Payne <sup>[1]</sup> (m. 5 February 1923)
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Plaque commemorating Davies' supposed place of birth, at "The Church House Inn", in Pillgwenlly, Newport, Wales.

The son of an iron moulder, Davies was born at 6, Portland Street in the Pillgwenlly district of Newport, Monmouthshire, a busy port. He had an older brother, Francis Gomer Boase (who was considered "slow") and in 1874 his younger sister Matilda was born.

In November 1874, when William was aged three, his father died. The following year his mother Mary Anne Davies remarried and became Mrs Joseph Hill. She agreed that care of the three children should pass to their paternal grandparents, Francis and Lydia Davies, who ran the nearby Church House Inn at 14, Portland Street. His grandfather Francis Boase Davies, originally from Cornwall, had been a sea captain. Davies was related to the famous British actor Sir Henry Irving (referred to as cousin Brodribb by the family); he later recalled

that his grandmother referred to Irving as " the cousin who brought disgrace on us". Davies' grandmother was described, by a neighbour who remembered her, as wearing ".. pretty little caps, with bebe ribbon, tiny roses and puce trimmings".<sup>[4]</sup> Writing in his Introduction to the 1943 *Collected Poems of W. H. Davies*, Osbert Sitwell recalled Davies telling him that, in addition to his grandparents and himself, his home consisted of "an imbecile brother, a sister;... a maidservant, a dog, a cat, a parrot, a dove and a canary bird." Sitwell also recounts that Davies' grandmother, a Baptist by denomination, was "of a more austere and religious turn of mind than her husband."<sup>[5]</sup>

In 1879 the family moved to Raglan Street, then to Upper Lewis Street, from where William attended Temple School. In 1883 he moved to Alexandra Road School and the following year was arrested, as one of a gang of five schoolmates, and charged with stealing handbags. He was given twelve strokes of the birch. In 1885 Davies wrote his first poem entitled "Death".

In his *Poet's Pilgrimage* (1918) Davies recounts the time when, at the age of 14, he was left with orders to sit with his dying grandfather. He missed the final moments of his grandfather's death as he was too engrossed in reading "a very interesting book of wild adventure".<sup>[6]</sup>

## Delinquent to "supertramp"

Having finished school under the cloud of his theft he worked first for an ironmonger. In November 1886, his grandmother signed the papers for Davies to begin a five-year apprenticeship to a local picture-frame maker. Davies never enjoyed the craft, however, and never settled into any regular work. He was a difficult and somewhat delinquent young man, and made repeated requests to his grandmother to lend him the money to sail to America. When these were all refused, he eventually left Newport, took casual work and started to travel. *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*, published in 1908, covers his life in the United States between 1893 and 1899, including many adventures and characters from his travels as a drifter. During this period he crossed the Atlantic at least seven times, working on cattle ships. He travelled through many of the states,

sometimes begging, sometimes taking seasonal work, but often ending up spending any savings on a drinking spree with a fellow traveller.

He took advantage of the corrupt system of "boodle", to pass the winter in Michigan, by agreeing to be locked up in a series of different jails. Here, with his fellow tramps, Davies would enjoy the relative comfort of "card-playing, singing, smoking, reading, relating experiences and occasionally taking exercise or going out for a walk."<sup>[7]</sup> At one stage, on his way to Memphis, Tennessee, he lay alone in a swamp for three days and nights suffering from malaria.<sup>[3]</sup>

The turning point in Davies' life came when, after a week of rambling in London, he spotted a newspaper story about the riches to be made in the Klondike and immediately set off to make his fortune in Canada. Attempting to jump a freight train at Renfrew, Ontario, on 20 March 1899, with fellow tramp Three-fingered Jack, he lost his footing and his right foot was crushed under the wheels of the train. The leg later had to be amputated below the knee and he wore a wooden leg thereafter. Davies' biographers have agreed that the significance of the accident should not be underestimated, even though Davies himself played down the story. Moulton begins his biography with the incident,<sup>[8]</sup> and Stonesifer has suggested that this event, more than any other, led Davies to become a professional poet.<sup>[9]</sup> Davies himself wrote of the accident: "I bore this accident with an outward fortitude that was far from the true state of my feelings. Thinking of my present helplessness caused me many a bitter moment, but I managed to impress all comers with a false indifference.... I was soon home again, having been away less than four months; but all the wildness had been taken out of me, and my adventures after this were not of my own seeking, but the result of circumstances."<sup>[10]</sup> Davies's view of his own disability was ambivalent. In his poem "The Fog", published in the 1913 *Foliage*,<sup>[11]</sup> a blind man leads the poet through the fog, showing the reader that one who is handicapped in one domain may well have a considerable advantage in another.

## Poet

He returned to Britain, living a rough life, particularly in London shelters and doss-houses, including the Salvation Army hostel in Southwark known as "The Ark"<sup>[12]</sup> which he grew to despise. Fearing the contempt of his fellow tramps, he would often feign slumber in the corner of his doss-house, mentally composing his poems and only later committing them to paper in private. At one stage he borrowed money to have his poems printed on loose sheets of paper, which he then tried to sell door-to-door through the streets of residential London. When this enterprise failed, he returned to his lodgings, and in a fit of rage, burned all of the printed sheets in the fire.<sup>[9]</sup>

Davies self-published his first book of poetry, *The Soul's Destroyer*, in 1905, again by means of his own

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### Leisure

What is this life if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs  
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,  
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad day light,  
Streams full of stars, like skies at night.

savings. It proved to be the beginning of success and a growing reputation. Even to get the slim volume published, Davies had to forgo his allowance and live the life of a tramp for six months (with the first draft of the book hidden in his pocket), just to secure a loan of funds from his inheritance. When eventually published, the volume was largely ignored and he resorted to posting individual copies by hand to prospective wealthy customers chosen from the pages of *Who's Who*, asking them to send the price of the book, a half crown, in return. He eventually managed to sell 60 of the 200 copies printed.<sup>[3]</sup> One of the copies was sent to Arthur Adcock, then a journalist with the *Daily Mail*. On reading the book, as he later wrote in his essay "Gods of Modern Grub Street", Adcock said that he "recognised that there were crudities and even doggerel in it, there was also in it some of the freshest and most magical poetry to be found in modern books."<sup>[9]</sup> He sent the price of the book and asked Davies to meet him. Adcock is still generally regarded as "the man who discovered Davies."<sup>[9]</sup> The first trade edition of *The Soul's Destroyer* was published by Alston Rivers in 1907. A second edition followed in 1908 and a third in 1910. A 1906 edition, by Fifield, was advertised but has not been verified.<sup>[13]</sup>

No time to turn at beauty's glance,  
And watch her feet, how they can  
dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can  
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,  
We have no time to stand and stare.

”

from *Songs of Joy and Others* (1911)

## Rural life in Kent

On 12 October 1905 Davies met Edward Thomas, then literary critic for the *Daily Chronicle* in London, who was to do more to help him than anyone else.<sup>[9]</sup> Thomas rented for Davies the tiny two-roomed "Stidulph's Cottage", in Egg Pie Lane, not far from his own home at Elses Farm near Sevenoaks in Kent. Davies moved to the cottage from 6 Llanwern Street, Newport, via London, in the second week of February 1907. The cottage was "only two meadows off" from Thomas's own house.<sup>[14]</sup> Thomas adopted the role of protective guardian for Davies, on one occasion even arranging for the manufacture, by a local wheelwright, of a makeshift replacement wooden leg, which was invoiced to Davies as "a novelty cricket bat".

In 1907, the manuscript of *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp* drew the attention of George Bernard Shaw, who agreed to write a preface (largely through the concerted efforts of his wife Charlotte). It was only because of Shaw that Davies' contract with the publishers was rewritten to allow the author to retain the serial rights, all rights after three years, royalties of 15 per cent of selling price, and a non-returnable advance of £25. Davies was also to be given a say on the style of all illustrations, advertisement layouts and cover designs. The original publisher, Duckworth and Sons, rejected these terms, and so the book was placed instead with the London publisher Fifield.<sup>[9]</sup>

A number of anecdotes of Davies's time with the Thomas family in Kent are recounted in the brief account later published by Thomas's widow Helen.<sup>[15]</sup> In 1911, Davies was awarded a Civil List Pension of £50,<sup>[16]</sup> later increased to £100 and then again to £150.

Davies started to spend more time in London and made many literary friends and acquaintances. Though averse to giving autographs himself, Davies began to make a collection of his own and was particularly keen to obtain that of D. H. Lawrence.

Georgian poetry publisher Edward Marsh was able to secure an autograph and also invited Lawrence and wife-to-be Frieda to meet Davies on 28 July 1913. Lawrence was immediately captivated by Davies and later invited him to join them in Germany. Despite his early enthusiasm for Davies' work, however, Lawrence's opinion changed after reading *Foliage* and he commented after reading *Nature Poems* in Italy that the verses seemed "so thin, one can hardly feel them."<sup>[9]</sup>

By this time Davies had a library of about fifty books in his cottage, most of them 16th and 17th-century poets, and including Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Byron, Burns, Shelley, Keats, Coleridge, Blake and Herrick. In December 1908 his essay "How It Feels To Be Out of Work", described by Stonesifer as "a rather pedestrian performance", appeared in the pages of *The English Review*. He continued to send other periodical articles out to editors, but without success.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Social life in London

After lodging at a number of temporary addresses in Sevenoaks, Davies moved back to London early in 1914, settling eventually at 14 Great Russell Street in the Bloomsbury district, previously the residence of Charles Dickens. Here in a tiny two-room apartment, initially infested with mice and rats, and next door to rooms occupied by a noisy Belgian prostitute, he lived from early 1916 until 1921. It was during this time in London that Davies embarked on a series of public readings of his work, alongside such others as Hilaire Belloc and W. B. Yeats, impressing fellow poet Ezra Pound. He soon found that he was able to socialise with leading society figures of the day, including Arthur Balfour and Lady Randolph Churchill. While in London Davies also became friendly with a number of artists, including Jacob Epstein, Harold and Laura Knight, Nina Hamnett, Augustus John, Harold Gilman, William Rothenstein, Walter Sickert, Sir William Nicholson and Osbert and Edith Sitwell. He enjoyed the society of literary men and their conversation, particularly in the rarefied downstairs at the Café Royal. He would also meet regularly with W. H. Hudson, Edward Garrett and others at The Mont Blanc in Soho.<sup>[17]</sup>

For his poetry Davies drew extensively on his experiences with the seamier side of life, but also on his love of nature. By the time of his prominent place in the Edward Marsh *Georgian Poetry* series, he was an established figure. He is generally best known for the opening two lines of the poem "Leisure", first published in *Songs of Joy and Others* in 1911: "What is this life if, full of care / We have no time to stand and stare...."

In October 1917 his work was included in the anthology *Welsh Poets: A Representative English selection from Contemporary Writers* collated by A. G. Prys-Jones and published by Erskine Macdonald of London.

In the last months of 1921, Davies moved to more comfortable quarters at 13 Avery Row, Brook Street, where he rented rooms from the Quaker poet Olaf Baker. He began to find prolonged work difficult, however, suffering from increased bouts of rheumatism and other ailments. Harlow (1993) lists a total of 14 BBC broadcasts of Davies reading his own work made between 1924 and

1940 (now held in the [BBC broadcast archive](#))<sup>[18]</sup> although none included his most famous work, "Leisure". *Later Days*, the 1925 sequel to *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*, describes the beginnings of Davies's career as a writer and his acquaintance with Belloc, Shaw, [de la Mare](#) and many others.

He became "the most painted literary man of his day", thanks to Augustus John, Sir William Nicholson, Dame Laura Knight and Sir William Rothenstein. His head in bronze was the most successful of Epstein's smaller works.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Marriage and later life

On 5 February 1923, Davies married 23-year-old Helen Matilda Payne, at the Registry Office in [East Grinstead](#), Sussex, and the couple set up home in the town at "Tor Leven", Cantelupe Road. According to one of the witnesses, [Conrad Aiken](#), the ceremony proceeded with Davies "in a near panic".<sup>[9][19]</sup> His book *Young Emma* was a frank and often disturbing account of his life before and after picking Helen up at a bus-stop in the [Edgware Road](#) near [Marble Arch](#). He had caught sight of her just getting off the bus and describes her wearing a "saucy-looking little velvet cap with tassels".<sup>[20]</sup> Still unmarried, Helen was pregnant at the time.<sup>[21]</sup> While living with Davies in London, before the couple were married, Helen suffered a dramatic and almost fatal miscarriage.



Davies' last home "Glendower",  
Watledge Road, Nailsworth,  
Gloucestershire

Although Davies eagerly sent the manuscript for *Young Emma* to [Jonathan Cape](#) in August 1924, he later changed his mind and asked for the manuscript to be returned and the copies destroyed. Only Davies' lack of direct instruction prompted Cape to secretly keep the copies in a locked safe. Later, after Davies' death, when asked by Cape for his advice, George Bernard Shaw advised against publication, and the book was eventually published only after Helen's death in 1979.<sup>[22]</sup>

The couple lived quietly and happily, moving from East Grinstead, first to Sevenoaks, then to "Malpas House", [Oxted](#) in Surrey and finally to a series of five different residences at [Nailsworth](#) in Gloucestershire. The first of these was the comfortable detached 19th-century stone-built house "Axpills" (later known as "Shenstone"), with a garden of some character. In the last seven years of his life he lived in four different houses, all within a mile and the first three all within 300 yards (270 m) of one another.<sup>[17]</sup> His last home was the small roadside cottage "Glendower" in the hamlet of Watledge. The couple had no children.

In 1930 Davies edited the poetry anthology *Jewels of Song* for Cape, choosing works by more than 120 different poets, and including [William Blake](#), [Thomas Campion](#), [William Shakespeare](#), [Alfred, Lord Tennyson](#) and [W. B. Yeats](#). Of his own poems he selected only "The Kingfisher" and "Leisure". The collection was re-published as *An Anthology of Short Poems* in 1938.

## Decline and death



Davies returned to Newport, in September 1938, for the unveiling of a plaque in his honour at the Church House Inn, and with an address given by the Poet Laureate John Masefield. He was still unwell, however, and this proved to be his last public appearance.<sup>[3]</sup>

Before his marriage to Helen, Davies would regularly visit London and stay with Osbert Sitwell and his brother Sacheverell. He particularly enjoyed walking with them along the river from the Houses of Parliament to the Physic Garden, near to their house, in Chelsea. During his visits Davies would often call, on a Sunday afternoon, to hear recitals on the harpsichord and clavichord given by Violet Gordon Woodhouse. Having moved to Watledge the Davieses continued to visit Gordon Woodhouse, at her house in Nether Lypiatt, near Stroud, to dine with the Sitwells.

About three months before he died, Davies was visited at Glendower by Gordon Woodhouse and the Sitwells, Davies being too ill to travel to dinner at Nether Lypiatt. Osbert Sitwell noted that Davies looked "very ill" but that "his head, so typical of him in its rustic and nautical boldness, with the black hair now greying a little, but as stiff as ever, surrounding his high bony forehead, seemed to have acquired an even more sculptural quality." Helen privately explained to Sitwell that Davies' heart showed "alarming symptoms of weakness" caused, according to his doctors, by the continuous dragging weight of his wooden leg. Helen had been careful to keep the true extent of the medical diagnosis from her husband.

Davies himself confided in Sitwell:

I've never been ill before, really, except when I had that accident and lost my leg.... And, d'you know, I grow so irritable when I've got that pain, I can't bear the sound of people's voices.... Sometimes I feel I should like to turn over on my side and die.<sup>[5]</sup>

Davies' health continued to deteriorate and he died, in September 1940, at the age of 69. Never a church-goer in his adult life, Davies was cremated at Cheltenham and his remains interred there.

## Glendower

From 1949, "Glendower" was the home of the poet's great nephew Norman Phillips. In 2003, Phillips suffered a heart attack and was forced to move into council accommodation. He subsequently spent £34,000 on the house, hoping to move back, but faced a further five figure sum for essential maintenance. Local residents, including Anthony Burton and biographer Barbara Hooper, formed "The Friends of Glendower" to help save the property and promote the poet's work. Stroud District Council, however, had already voted to embark on the process of obtaining a Compulsory Purchase Order. In 2010, "The Friends of Glendower" arranged a series of lectures, exhibitions, walks and other events, in Nailsworth and Stroud, between 13 and 26 September to mark the 70th anniversary of the poet's death.<sup>[23][24]</sup>

In December 2012 a number of Davies' books, signed by the author, were found during restoration of the cottage which had been instigated by the Friends of Glendower. The first phase of restoration was due to be completed in 2013, making part of the house habitable once more. Five signed books were found, in a wardrobe in one of the bedrooms, together with letters from Davies to family

members. The Friends hoped that the books would remain in Nailsworth and that the cottage might become a Davies study-centre, using the collection of books, manuscripts and belongings that had remained in the family. The plans would include use of the cottage as a home by Phillips, who was one of the last remaining direct descendants of the Davies family.<sup>[25]</sup>

## Literary style

Davies' principal biographer Stonesifer likens the quality of Davies' prose, with its often childlike realism, directness and simplicity, to that of Defoe and George Borrow. Davies' style was described by Shaw as that of "a genuine innocent",<sup>[9]</sup> while Hockey says:

"It is as a poet of nature that Davies has become most famous; and it is not surprising that he should have taken nature as his main subject. He had lived close to the earth and in the open air, and had grown to love the countryside with its fields, woods and streams, its hedges and flowers, its birds and beasts, bees and butterflies, its sunny and cloudy skies and capricious moods: in short its infinite variety. Though a man of limited education, here he was at no disadvantage with an intellectual; for appreciation of nature is based not on intellect but on love and Davies loved nature deeply. His nature poetry is founded on his delight in nature, and he exulted in revealing the loveliness of heaven and earth and his interest in the creatures of the countryside. As does a child, a pagan or a mystic, he glorified nature and never ceased to regard it with eyes of wonder".<sup>[26]</sup>

For his honorary degree in 1926, Davies was introduced to the assembly at the University of Wales by Professor W. D. Thomas with a citation that may still serve as a summary of Davies' themes, style and tone:

"A Welshman, a poet of distinction, and a man in whose work much of the peculiarly Welsh attitude to life is expressed with singular grace and sincerity. He combines a vivid sense of beauty with affection for the homely, keen zest for life and adventure with a rare appreciation of the common, universal pleasures, and finds in those simple things of daily life a precious quality, a dignity and a wonder that consecrate them. Natural, simple and unaffected, he is free from sham in feeling and artifice in expression. He has re-discovered for those who have forgotten them, the joys of simple nature. He has found romance in that which has become commonplace; and of the native impulses of an unspoilt heart, and the responses of a sensitive spirit, he has made a new world of experience and delight. He is a lover of life, accepting it and glorying in it. He affirms values that were falling into neglect, and in an age that is mercenary reminds us that we have the capacity for spiritual enjoyment."<sup>[9]</sup>

Somewhat surprisingly, his great friend and mentor, Edward Thomas, likened Davies to Wordsworth, writing: "He can write commonplace or inaccurate English, but it is also natural to him to write, such as Wordsworth wrote, with the clearness, compactness and felicity which make a man think with shame how unworthily, through natural stupidity or uncertainty, he manages his



native tongue. In subtlety he abounds, and where else today shall we find simplicity like this?"<sup>[27]</sup>

Daniel George, who reviewed the 1943 *Collected Poems* for *Tribune*, describes Davies' work, in his Foreword to the 1963 edition as "new yet old, recalling now Herrick, now Blake – of whom it was said, as of Goldsmith, that he wrote like angel but (according to those who had met him) talked like poor Poll, except that he was no parrot of other people's opinions."<sup>[28]</sup>

## Appearance and character

Osbert Sitwell, who was a close friend of Davies, thought that he bore an "unmistakable likeness" to his distant actor cousin Henry Irving. Sitwell provides a vivid description of the poet's physical appearance:

His cast of face was rather long and aquiline, but with broad high cheek bones, and all of it, chin, mouth, long upper lip, nose, and high forehead, was finely sculptured and full of character. Features and hair both exhibited a naturally proud, backward slant or tilt, though there was no arrogance in him. His eyes were dark and gleaming, like those of a blackbird, and his skin possessed an almost nautical tinge. He was broad-shouldered and vigorous looking, but of less than middle height. Having lost a leg, he wore – for he could not afford the expense of a new metal limb – a heavy wooden stump, which made a wooden sound as he walked, and gave him a slow and very personal gait, making him raise and dip his shoulders as he moved.<sup>[5]</sup>

Writing in the Introduction to his 1951 *The Essential W. H. Davies*, Brian Waters said of Davies that "character and personality rather than good looks were the keynote to his expressive face," continuing:

Most people who never knew him have come to look on Davies as a Welshman. He was neither Welsh nor English, but an ancient Briton in whom the tribal character of the Silurian stock has persisted into the present century – a type frequently recognisable in Monmouthshire. He knew no word of Welsh, he was not carried away by the sentiments of others and the mass emotionalism was foreign to his nature. His emotions and sympathies were his own and he translated then into his poetry.<sup>[17]</sup>

## Honours, memorials and legacy

In 1926 Davies was honoured with the degree of Doctor Litteris, *honoris causa* from the University of Wales.<sup>[9]</sup> Davies returned to his native Newport in 1930, where a luncheon was held in his honour at the Westgate Hotel.<sup>[29]</sup> His return, in September 1938, for the unveiling of the plaque in his honour, proved to be his last public appearance.<sup>[3]</sup>

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As I walked down the waterside  
This silent morning, wet and dark;  
Before the cocks in farmyards crowed,  
Before the dogs began to bark;  
Before the hour of five was struck

A large collection of Davies manuscripts, including a copy of "Leisure", dated 8 May 1914, is held by the National Library of Wales. The collection includes a copy of "A Boy's Sorrow", an apparently unpublished poem of two eight-line stanzas relating to the death of a neighbour. Also included is a volume (c. 1916) containing autograph fair copies of 15 Davies poems, some of them apparently unpublished, submitted to James Guthrie (1874–1952) for publication by the Pear Tree Press as a collection entitled *Quiet Streams*, to which annotations have been added by Lord Kenyon.<sup>[29]</sup>

British writer Gerald Brenan (1894–1987) and his generation were influenced by Davies' *Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*.<sup>[30]</sup>

In 1951 Jonathan Cape published *The Essential W. H. Davies*, selected and with an introduction by Brian Waters, a young Gloucestershire poet and writer whose work Davies admired, who described him as "about the last of England's professional poets". The collection included *The Autobiography of a Super-tramp*, and extracts from *Beggars*, *A Poet's Pilgrimage*, *Later Days*, *My Birds* and *My Garden*, as well as over 100 poems arranged by publication period.

Many of Davies' poems have been given a musical setting.<sup>[31]</sup> "Money, O!" was set to music for piano, in G minor, by Michael Head – his 1929 Boosey & Hawkes collection also included settings for "The Likeness", "The Temper of a Maid", "Natures' Friend", "Robin Redbreast" and "A Great Time". "A Great Time" has also been set by Otto Freudenthal (b.1934), Wynn Hunt (b.1910) and Newell Wallbank (b.1914).<sup>[32]</sup> There are also three songs by Sir Arthur Bliss – "Thunderstorms", "This Night", and "Leisure" – as well as "The Rain" for voice and piano, by Margaret Campbell Bruce, published in 1951 by J. Curwen and Sons.

Experimental Irish folk group Dr. Strangely Strange also sang and quoted from "Leisure" on their 1970 album *Heavy Petting*, with harmonium accompaniment. A musical adaptation of the same poem, with John Karvelas (vocals) and Nick Pitloglou (piano) and an animated film by Pipaluk Polanski, may be found on YouTube. Also in 1970, Fleetwood Mac recorded "Dragonfly", a song with lyrics taken from Davies' 1927 poem, "The Dragonfly". The song was also recorded by English singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Blake, for his 2011 album *The First Snow*.<sup>[33]</sup>

On 1 July 1971 a First Day Cover, with a matching commemorative post-mark was issued by the UK Post Office to mark Davies' centenary.

A controversial statue by Paul Bothwell-Kincaid, inspired by the poem "Leisure", was unveiled in Commercial Street, Newport in December 1990, to commemorate Davies' work, on the 50th anniversary of his death. The bronze head of Davies by Epstein, from January 1917, regarded by many as the most accurate artistic impression of Davies and a copy of which Davies owned himself, may be found at Newport Museum and Art Gallery (donated by Viscount Tredegar).<sup>[34]</sup>

By old Westminster's mighty clock:

As I walked down the waterside  
This morning, in the cold damp air,  
I saw a hundred women and men  
Huddled in rags and sleeping there:  
These people have no work, thought I,  
And long before their time they die.

„

from "The Sleepers", *Songs of Joy and Others* (1911)

In August 2010 the play *Supertramp, Sickert and Jack the Ripper* by Lewis Davies, concerning an imagined sitting by Davies for a portrait by Walter Sickert, received its première at the Edinburgh Festival.<sup>[35]</sup>

## Works

- *The Soul's Destroyer and Other Poems* (of the author, The Farmhouse, 1905) (also Alston Rivers, 1907), (Jonathan Cape, 1921)
- *New Poems* (Elkin Mathews, 1907)
- *Nature Poems* (Fifield, 1908)
- *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp* (Fifield, 1908) (autobiographical)
- *How It Feels To Be Out of Work* (*The English Review*, 1 December 1908)
- *Beggars* (Duckworth, 1909) (autobiographical)
- *Farewell to Poesy* (Fifield, 1910)
- *Songs of Joy and Others* (Fifield, 1911)
- *A Weak Woman* (Duckworth, 1911)
- *The True Traveller* (Duckworth, 1912) (autobiographical)
- *Foliage: Various Poems* (Elkin Mathews, 1913)
- *Nature* (Batsford, 1914) (autobiographical)
- *The Bird of Paradise* (Methuen, 1914)
- *Child Lovers* (Fifield, 1916)
- *Collected Poems* (Fifield, 1916)
- *A Poet's Pilgrimage* (or *A Pilgrimage In Wales*) (Melrose, 1918) (autobiographical)
- *Forty New Poems* (Fifield, 1918)
- *Raptures* (Beaumont Press, 1918)
- *The Song of Life* (Fifield, 1920)
- *The Captive Lion and Other Poems* (Yale University Press, on the Kinglsey Trust Association Publication Fund, 1921)
- *Form* (ed. Davies and Austin O. Spare, Vol 1, Numbers 1, 2 & 3, 1921/1922)
- *The Hour of Magic* (illustrated by Sir William Nicholson, Jonathan Cape, 1922)
- *Shorter Lyrics of the Twentieth Century, 1900–1922* (ed Davies, Bodley Head, 1922) (anthology)
- *True Travellers. A Tramp's Opera in Three Acts* (illustrated by Sir William Nicholson, Jonathan Cape, 1923)
- *Collected Poems, 1st Series* (Jonathan Cape, 1923)
- *Collected Poems, 2nd Series* (Jonathan Cape, 1923)
- *Selected Poems* (illustrated with woodcuts by Stephen Bone, Jonathan Cape, 1923)
- 'Poets and Critics' – *New Statesman*, 21, (8 September 1923)
- *What I Gained and Lost By Not Staying at School* (Teachers World 29, June 1923)
- *Secrets* (Jonathan Cape, 1924)
- *Moll Flanders*, introduction by Davies (Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co, 1924)
- *A Poet's Alphabet* (Jonathan Cape, 1925; illustrated by Dora Batty)<sup>[36]</sup>
- *Later Days* (Jonathan Cape, 1925) (autobiographical)
- *Augustan Book of Poetry: Thirty Selected Poems* (Benn, 1925)
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- 'Epilogue' to *The Romance of the Echoing Wood*, (a Welsh tale by W. J. T. Collins, R. H. Johns Ltd, 1937)
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- *Collected Poems of W. H. Davies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940)
- Waters, B. (ed.), *The Essential W. H. Davies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1951)
- Waterman, Rory (ed. and introd.) *W. H. Davies, the True Traveller: A Reader* (Manchester: Fyfield/Carcanet Press, 2015)

## Notes

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1. Born 1899 in Sussex, died 1979 in Bournemouth; on Davies' death in 1940, probate awarded was £2,441.15s
2. Although a number of secondary sources give a birth on 20 April 1871, a date in which Davies himself fully believed all his life, his birth certificate gives 3 July 1871.
3. Normand, L. (2003), *W. H. Davies*, Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press Ltd.
4. F. J. Hando, *The Pleasant Land of Gwent*, 1944, R. H. Johns, Newport.
5. *Collected Poems of W. H. Davies*, London: Jonathan Cape (3rd impression 1943), pp. xxi–xxviii, "Introduction" by Osbert Sitwell.
6. Davies, W. H. (1918), *A Poet's Pilgrimage*, London: Melrose, pp. 42–44.
7. Hockey, L. (1971), *W. H. Davies*, University of Wales Press (on behalf of the Welsh Arts Council), p. 16.
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9. Stonesifer, R. J. (1963), *W. H. Davies – A Critical Biography*, London: Jonathan Cape, ISBN B0000CLPA3 (first full biography of Davies).
10. Davies, W. H. (1908), *The Autobiography of a Super Tramp*, London: Fifield, Chapter XX: "Hospitality".
11. Davies, William H. *Foliage* (<http://archive.org/details/foilage09323gut>) – via Internet Archive.
12. "The Salvation Army London City Colony: Statistics" ([https://web.archive.org/web/20120223225548/http://www1.salvationarmy.org.uk/uki/www\\_uki\\_ihc.nsf/vw-sublinks/7CAC02A4A3A57CC880257451004D619E?openDocument](https://web.archive.org/web/20120223225548/http://www1.salvationarmy.org.uk/uki/www_uki_ihc.nsf/vw-sublinks/7CAC02A4A3A57CC880257451004D619E?openDocument)). [www1.salvationarmy.org.uk](http://www1.salvationarmy.org.uk). Archived from the original ([http://www1.salvationarmy.org.uk/uki/www\\_uki\\_ihc.nsf/vw-sublinks/7CAC02A4A3A57CC880257451004D619E?openDocument](http://www1.salvationarmy.org.uk/uki/www_uki_ihc.nsf/vw-sublinks/7CAC02A4A3A57CC880257451004D619E?openDocument)) on 23 February 2012. Retrieved 18 June 2014.
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14. Davies, W. H. (1914), *Nature*, London: Batsford, Chapter I.
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17. Waters, B. (ed) (1951), *The Essential W. H. Davies*, London: Jonathan Cape, (Introduction: W. H. Davies, Man and Poet, pp. 9–20)
18. Harlow, S. (1993), *W. H. Davies – A Bibliography*, Winchester, Oak Knoll Books, St.Paul's Bibliographies. ISBN 1-873040-00-8
19. The marriage certificate gives Davies' occupation as "An Author", that of his father (sic) as "Able Seaman" and that of Helen's father as "Farmer".
20. "An Amazing Document – from the Tablet Archive" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20150919162529/http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/24th-january-1981/14/an-amazing-document>). [thetablet.co.uk](http://archive.thetablet.co.uk). Archived from the original (<http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/24th-january-1981/14/an-amazing-document>) on 19 September 2015. Retrieved 31 January 2015.

21. Stonesifier describes Helen as "a twenty-two-year-old Sussex girl, a nurse in a hospital to which he was sent for treatment" when Davies was very ill in the spring of 1922. While Dame Veronica Wedgwood, in her preface to the book, describes Helen as "a country girl who had come to London, become pregnant by a man whom she could not marry, was without resources and afraid to go back to her people."
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## External links

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- Transcription of Supertramp and a selection of poems (<http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~alwyn/books/Supertramp/index.htm>)

- W. H. Davies archive items (<https://web.archive.org/web/20110723151247/http://ww3.gloucestershire.gov.uk/Dserve/dserve.exe?dsqIni=Dserve.ini&dsqApp=Archive&dsqDb=Catalog&dsqCmd=NaviTree.tcl&dsqField=RefNo&dsqItem=D10828%2F8%2F6%2F4>) held by Gloucestershire County Council
- Davies archive (<http://www.llgc.org.uk/index.php?id=4762>) at the National Library of Wales
- W. H. Davies Letters ([https://web.archive.org/web/20160303232027/http://www.archiveswales.org.uk/anw/get\\_collection.php?inst\\_id=1&coll\\_id=808&expand=](https://web.archive.org/web/20160303232027/http://www.archiveswales.org.uk/anw/get_collection.php?inst_id=1&coll_id=808&expand=)) at National Library of Wales
- Works by W. H. Davies ([https://www.gutenberg.org/author/Davies,+W.+H.+\(William+Henry\)](https://www.gutenberg.org/author/Davies,+W.+H.+(William+Henry))) at Project Gutenberg
- Works by or about W. H. Davies (<https://archive.org/search.php?query=%28%28subject%3A%22Davies%2C%20William%20Henry%22%20OR%20subject%3A%22Davies%2C%20William%20H%2E%22%20OR%20subject%3A%22Davies%2C%20W%2E%20H%2E%22%20OR%20subject%3A%22William%20Henry%20Davies%22%20OR%20subject%3A%22William%20H%2E%20Davies%22%20OR%20subject%3A%22W%2E%20H%2E%20Davies%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22William%20Henry%20Davies%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22William%20H%2E%20Davies%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22W%2E%20H%2E%20Davies%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22W%2E%20Henry%20Davies%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Davies%2C%20William%20Henry%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Davies%2C%20William%20H%2E%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Davies%2C%20W%2E%20H%2E%22%20OR%20creator%3A%22Davies%2C%20W%2E%20H%2E%22%20OR%20title%3A%22William%20Henry%20Davies%22%20OR%20title%3A%22W%2E%20H%2E%20Davies%22%20OR%20description%3A%22William%20Henry%20Davies%22%20OR%20description%3A%22William%20H%2E%20Davies%22%20OR%20description%3A%22W%2E%20H%2E%20Davies%22%20OR%20description%3A%22Davies%2C%20William%20H%2E%22%29%20OR%20%28%221871-1940%22%20AND%20Davies%29%29%20AND%20%28-mediatype:software%29>) at Internet Archive
- Works by W. H. Davies (<https://librivox.org/author/2659>) at LibriVox (public domain audiobooks) 
- *The Autobiography of a Super-tramp* by W. H. Davies ([http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/to/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/books/non-fiction/article3896301.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/to/arts_and_entertainment/books/non-fiction/article3896301.ece)) review by *The Times*, 8 May 2008, (subscription required)
- "Poet's clock to be sent 'home'" ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/gloucestershire/hi/people\\_and\\_places/history/newsid\\_8424000/8424763.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/gloucestershire/hi/people_and_places/history/newsid_8424000/8424763.stm)) BBC, 21 December 2009
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- "The supertramp – W.H.Davies" at greenfolder.co.nz (<http://www.greenfolder.co.nz/WHD/home.html>) – browsable collection of some poems and prose (non-profit organisation)
- Video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyA3p0ETx eo>) on YouTube "The Kingfisher" read by Siân Phillips

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